

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2011

Agenda Item: Mount Haggin WMA-South Grazing Lease Renewal

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

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Background

FWP is proposing to maintain a cooperative rest-rotation grazing program on the Mount Haggin WMA-South grazing system for a 10-year term to extend June 2011 through October 2020. The decision allows for the current usage of fee grazing (total 321 Animal Units/1,191 Animal Unit Months) for three local livestock producers (Clyde Thompson 141 AU/523AUM; Bacon Ranch 130AU/482AUM; and Ralston Ranch 50AU/186AUM). In addition, the decision allows for an increase of use by the Ralston Ranch by an additional 178 AU/658 AUM through an exchange of use agreement. This brings the total livestock use on the Mount Haggin WMA-South grazing system to 499 Animal Units and 1,846 Animal Unit Months.

Public Involvement

Under MEPA, an Environmental Assessment was completed by FWP and released for public comment on Feb. 1-28. Legal notices were printed in the *Montana Standard* and the *Anaconda Leader*. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage. Five parties submitted comments over the 27-day comment period ending at 5:00 p.m. on February 28, 2011. Of the five respondents, four stated direct support for Alternative A; and one generally opposed livestock use of WMAs, but asked that since FWP appears committed to grazing on Mount Haggin WMA, that FWP consider his comments and incorporates his ideas into the planning process.

Alternatives and Analysis

The following three alternatives were considered in this Environmental Assessment:

- Alternative A: Renewal of the Mount Haggin WMA-South grazing lease with an increase in AUM's for the Ralston Ranch. Cattle would be used to manage vegetative conditions on the WMA to benefit of elk and other wildlife. Minor impacts to riparian areas and fisheries will be mitigated by vegetative rest and stocking rate. Also, with an increase in use by the Ralston Ranch, habitat improvements will occur on about 29,800 acres, 25 streams and 64 stream miles of private, state & federal lands to benefit native fisheries, wildlife, and the public.
- Alternative B: Renewal of the Mount Haggin WMA-South grazing lease without increasing AUM's for the Ralston Ranch. Cattle would be used to manage vegetative conditions on the WMA to benefit elk and other wildlife. Minor impacts to riparian areas and fisheries will be mitigated by vegetative rest and stocking rate, but no additional benefits would be realized and fish and wildlife populations may be negatively impacted.
- Alternative C (No Action): Elimination of livestock grazing on the Mount Haggin WMA-South grazing system. None of the additional benefits across a broader landscape would be realized.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission approve the Mount Haggin WMA-South Grazing Lease Renewal with an increase in use by the Ralston Ranch, to positively affect 29,811 acres, 25 streams and 64 stream miles across state, federal, and private lands to benefit fish, wildlife, and the public.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission approve the Mount Haggin WMA-South Grazing Lease Renewal as described in the Final EA.